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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 000398

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR P, NEA/IR, DRL/NESCA, AF/S

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2020

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL SA

SUBJECT: DIRCO ON IRAN: ANY UNHRC MOTIONS SHOULD URGE DIALOGUE

REF: A. PRETORIA 00384

¶B. SECSTATE 16236

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Helen La Lime for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶11. (C) South African officials request confirmation before February 27 that the USG will introduce a resolution on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran at the next session of the U.N. Human Rights Council (HRC). After consultation with DRL, Poloff informed the SAG today that this decision has not been made and is still being considered at the highest levels. While the SAG will not necessarily vote in favor of any such motion, it wholeheartedly favors the HRC as the proper venue for debate on human rights matters, rather than the General Assembly (UNGA). Further, the SAG suggests that any proposal include a provision to explore alternative avenues to engage the GOI, giving the GOI ample opportunity to demonstrate either its willingness to cooperate, or its continued recalcitrance. End summary.

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IRAN: AGENDA ITEM #1  
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¶12. (U) Poloffs met with Mr. Pitso Montwedi, Chief Director, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in the Multilateral Branch of the Department of International Relations (DIRCO); Raymond Sithole, Deputy Director for Civil and Political Rights (CPR); Laura Lazarous, Assistant Director for CPR and Sybil Matlhako, Assistant Director for CPR. The discussion of Iran took place in the context of poloffs' delivery of the demarche on USG priorities for the March session of the HRC. (Pretoria 00384)

¶13. (C) Montwedi began the meeting by asking for confirmation that the USG would introduce a resolution on the status of human rights in Iran. Montwedi shared a letter from Mr. Aryeh Neier, president of the Open Society Institute (OSI), written to Susan van der Merwe, Deputy Minister of DIRCO. In the letter Neier asks for South Africa's support and leadership in the March session of the HRC on an Iran resolution.

¶14. (C) If the U.S. were planning such a resolution, Montwedi further asked how this development would affect the USG's support of the Canadian resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which they have tabled each of the last seven years.

¶15. (C) Montwedi shared that Ambassador Sipho George Nene,

Deputy Director General of the Multilateral Branch of DIRCO, leaves for Geneva on Saturday, February 27, and would like to know the USG's plans before then. After consultation with DRL, Poloff informed the SAG today that this decision has not been made and is still being considered at the highest levels.

¶ 6. (C) The SAG welcomes the introduction of an Iran resolution in the March session of the HRC as a "constructive approach to bring this resolution home." Montwedi stressed that while the SAG may vote against said resolution, they strongly support the approach of beginning the process in the HRC and would make statements to that effect. He added that he thought both "friends and foes" would welcome this approach and the latter would no longer be able to vote against an Iran resolution under the guise of technicalities like the lack of "system-wide coherence". (Comment: Montwedi was wryly referring to his own seniors, encouraging greater pressure on them to take a clearer stand on Iran. End Comment.)

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BEYOND RESOLUTIONS: ANOTHER APPROACH  
QBEYOND RESOLUTIONS: ANOTHER APPROACH  
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¶ 7. (C) Montwedi discussed the necessity of exploring other avenues to engender cooperation with the GOI. He explained that while the Iranian conflict has been addressed repeatedly at the ambassadorial level, such discussion has not mustered the desired consensus or cooperation, but rather hardened the attitudes of opposing camps. The SAG suggests convening a meeting of ministers with Ahmadinejad or some other type of

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high-level special conference focused on Iran.

¶ 8. (C) As a potential next step, the SAG proposes the dispatch to Tehran of a group of "eminent personalities" to negotiate with the GOI. Montwedi cautioned that the group would have to consist of credible international negotiators interested in honest brokering. When Poloff asked for possible examples of appropriate emissaries, Montwedi listed former U.S. Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, Prince Hassan and Queen Rania of Jordan or former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. If such a distinguished delegation failed to make progress, the SAG suggests that the fallback position would be to send heads of state to Tehran to negotiate with Ahmadinejad.

¶ 9. (C) In the event a visit by heads of state to Tehran also failed, Montwedi suggested that even those member states who have historically supported the GOI would have to concede that Iran was to blame for the lack of progress and would have no choice but to refer the situation to the Security Council. He added that the GOI has been driven into an extreme position by the international community's censure and such a program of high-level engagement would force the GOI to "either take advantage of the opportunity or let it slip through their fingers." Asked for the SAG's sense of Iran's intent, Montwedi said he did feel Iran was genuinely interested in improved relations, since at present "they do not envy the position they are in."

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COMMENT  
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¶ 10. (C) The SAG has no desire to confront the GOI publicly about its ongoing human rights violations, but seems to want to place that responsibility with other member states. Its suggestion to engage the GOI at the ministerial or head-of-state level could be a way to buy time for the GOI, or it could be a genuine attempt to find an effective solution. Post will continue to encourage SAG officials to support efforts to end human rights violations in Iran.

GIPS